

## History of Fort Richardson

**F**ort Richardson was named for the military pioneer explorer, Brig. Gen. Wilds P. Richardson, who served three tours of duty in the rugged Alaska territory between 1897 and 1917. Richardson, a native Texan and an 1884 West Point graduate, commanded troops along the Yukon River and supervised construction of Fort Egbert near Eagle, and Fort William H. Seward (Chilkoot Barracks) near Haines.



Brig. Gen. Wilds P. Richardson

As head of the War Department's Alaska Road Commission during 1905-1917, he was responsible for much of the surveying and building of early railroads, roads and bridges that helped the state's settlement and growth. The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail, surveyed under his direction in 1904, was named the Richardson Highway in his honor.

Fort Richardson was built during 1940-1941 on the site of what is now Elmendorf Air Force Base. Established as the headquarters of the United States Army, Alaska (USARAL) in 1947, the post moved to its present location five miles north of Anchorage in 1950. The post then had barracks for 500 Soldiers, a rifle range, a few warehouses, a hospital and bachelor officer quarters.

Fort Richardson is now headquarters for United States Army Alaska, a subordinate unit of United States Army Pacific (USARPAC).

The majority of USARAK combat forces are at Fort Wainwright, with Fort Richardson as the primary support base. The major unit at Fort Richardson is U.S. Army Garrison, Alaska, which provides mission and installation support for USARAK's combat forces. The major combat unit at Fort Richardson is Task Force 1-501 Airborne, the only airborne infantry battalion in the Pacific Theater. Augmented by elements of other units, the task force is a self-contained unit under USARAK and deployed to

Afghanistan October 2003 through July 2004.

A full range of family and Soldier support facilities common to any small community are found on post, ranging from a shoppette to childcare and recreational facilities. The post has small but modern dental and medical clinics, and receives major medical services from the 3rd Medical Group hospital at Elmendorf Air Force Base. The Joint Military Mall located between Fort Richardson and Elmendorf provides post exchange and commissary services.

The post's largest military tenant is the Alaska National Guard, with facilities at Camp Carroll and Camp Denali. Fort Richardson also hosts several non-military activities to include a Veterans Administration National Cemetery and State of Alaska Fish Hatchery.

The fort has 3,300 Soldiers, with more than 3,200 family members here with their Soldier spouses. The fort employs about 1,200 Army and DOD civilian employees.

The annual military payroll for the fort in fiscal year 2003 was \$85 million. The civilian payroll was \$49 million. Including other expenditures of \$111 million, Fort Richardson put more than \$245 million into the local economy.

The fort encompasses 62,000 acres, which includes space for offices, family housing, a heliport, a drop zone suitable for airborne and air/land operations, firing ranges and other training areas. Nearby mountain ranges offer Soldiers the opportunity to learn mountain/glacier warfare and rescue techniques.



During a visit to a voter registration site in Khowst, Afghanistan, 2nd Lt. John Campbell, Company B, Task Force 1-501 Airborne, talks with a resident. At the time, more than 15,000 people had registered at the site.

Photo: Staff Sgt. Jeff Troth

**Aerial view of Fort Richardson, including housing areas.**

Photo: Soren Melchior